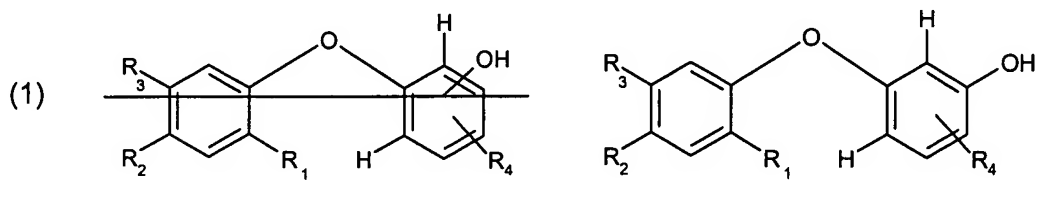


1-21 (cancelled).

22. (currently amended): An antimicrobial method, which comprises contacting a substrate with an antimicrobially effective amount of a hydroxydiphenyl ether compound of the formula



wherein, when OH is in the para position with respect to the ether linkage

~~R_4 is C_4 - C_{20} alkyl, C_5 - C_7 cycloalkyl, C_4 - C_6 alkylcarbonyl, C_4 - C_{20} alkoxy, phenyl or phenyl- C_4 - C_3 alkyl;~~

~~R_2 is hydrogen;~~

~~R_3 is C_4 - C_{20} alkyl or C_4 - C_{20} alkoxy;~~

~~R_4 is hydrogen; and wherein,~~

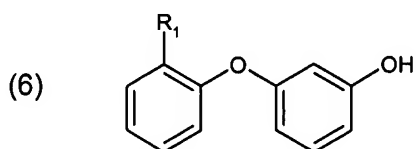
when OH is in the meta position with respect to the ether linkage

R_2 is hydrogen, C_1 - C_{20} alkyl, hydroxy substituted C_1 - C_{20} alkyl or C_1 - C_6 alkylcarbonyl;

R_1 and R_3 are independently of each other hydrogen or C_1 - C_{20} alkyl;

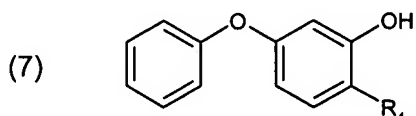
R_4 is hydrogen, hydroxy substituted C_1 - C_{20} alkyl or C_5 - C_7 cycloalkyl.

23. (previously presented): An antimicrobial method according to claim 22, wherein a compound of formula



wherein R_1 is C_1 - C_5 alkyl is employed.

24. (previously presented): An antimicrobial method according to claim 22, wherein a compound of formula



wherein R_4 is C_1 - C_5 alkyl is employed.

25 (previously presented): An antimicrobial method according to claim 22 which is carried out during finishing of undyed and dyed or printed fibre materials.

26. (previously presented): A method according to claim 22 for the antimicrobial treatment of skin, mucous membranes or hair which comprises applying an antimicrobially effective amount of a compound of the formula (1) as defined in claim 22 thereto.

27. (previously presented): A method of use of a compound of formula (1) as defined in claim 22 which comprises the incorporation of an antimicrobially effective amount of said compound into polymeric materials or the antimicrobial finishing of said polymeric materials with an antimicrobially effective amount of said compound as defined in claim 22.

28. (previously presented): A method according to claim 22 for the antimicrobial treatment of a hard surface which comprises applying to the hard surface an antimicrobially effective amount of a compound of the formula (1) as defined in claim 22.

29. (previously presented): A method for the antimicrobial treatment of teeth and gums which comprises applying an antimicrobially effective amount of a compound of the formula (1) as defined in claim 22 thereto.

30. (previously presented): An antimicrobial method according to claim 22, wherein a personal care composition comprising at least one compound of formula (1) as defined in claim 22 and a cosmetically tolerable carrier or auxiliary is employed.

31. (previously presented): An antimicrobial method according to claim 22, wherein an oral care composition comprising at least one compound of formula (1) as defined in claim 22 and a carrier or auxiliary is employed.

32. (previously presented): An antimicrobial method according to claim 22, wherein a detergent composition comprising at least one compound of formula (1) as defined in claim 22 and a carrier or auxiliary is employed.

33. (currently amended): An antimicrobial method according to claim 22, wherein a compound of formula (1) as defined in claim 22 wherein ~~OH is in the meta position with respect to the other linkage~~

~~and R₂, R₃ and R₄ are hydrogen and R₁ is C₁-C₂₀ alkyl, or wherein OH is in the para position with respect to the ether linkage and R₂ and R₄ are hydrogen and R₁ and R₃ are C₁-C₂₀ alkyl is employed.~~

34-36. (cancelled).

37. (currently amended): An antimicrobial method according to claim 22, wherein a compound of formula (1) as defined in claim 22 wherein ~~OH is in the meta position with respect to the ether linkage~~ and R₁, R₂ and R₃ are hydrogen and R₄ is in the para position with respect to the ether linkage and is C₁-C₂₀alkyl is employed.

38. (cancelled).